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ABSTRACT

Nearly 500,000 students responded to a survey on health and safety distributed by the "Weekly Reader" to second- through sixth-grade students throughout the United States. This report presents both a tabular depiction and a summarization of answers received from students to the 13 safety-related and six health-related questions. Questions dealt with: feelings of safety; safe places; safety rules; fear; seat belt use; illness; nutrition and exercise; self-concept; and smoking. (CB)

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The *Weekly Reader* National Survey On Safety and Health

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THE *WEEKLY READER* NATIONAL SURVEY

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	Page
Background	1
History	2
Purposes	3
Field Publications	4
General Methodology	5
Cautions in Interpreting Results	7
Distribution, Use of Results, Archiving	8
THE SURVEY ON SAFETY AND HEALTH	
Rationale	9
Specific Methodology	10
Specific Questions, Charts, Answer Summaries	
Section 1 - Safety	11
Section 2 - Health	25

THE *WEEKLY READER* NATIONAL SURVEY

Background

The *Weekly Reader* National Survey polls the nation's children twice a year in the pages of various *Weekly Reader* periodicals, which are published by Field Publications and distributed to school children in grades two through nine. Generally, about 500,000 children participate in the surveys, and about 100,000 responses are analyzed. The surveys cover children's attitudes about subjects of importance to them and to adults, such as the current survey on SAFETY AND HEALTH and earlier ones on DRUGS AND ALCOHOL and THE FUTURE. The results of **The *Weekly Reader* National Survey** have received wide publicity in the public press, are regularly reviewed in scholarly publications, and have served as the basis for changes in government policy.

History

The *Weekly Reader* National Survey was begun in the spring of 1983 with a survey on children's attitudes on Drugs and Alcohol. The response to that survey was so enthusiastic that a series was planned. Two surveys are now conducted every school year, each on a rotating cycle so that the same survey is repeated every four years, providing longitudinal data over time.

PAST AND PROJECTED SURVEYS

Spring 1983	**Drugs and Alcohol**
Spring 1984	**Citizenship**
Fall 1984	**Student Election Poll**
Spring 1985	**The Future**
Fall 1985	**Education**
Spring 1986	**Safety and Health**
Fall 1986	**Wildlife and Environment**
Spring 1987	**Drugs and Alcohol**
Fall 1987	**Undetermined**

(repeat cycle)

(The *Weekly Reader* Student Election Poll is a continuation of a presidential "election" conducted among students by *Weekly Reader* periodicals that has correctly predicted the results of every presidential election since 1956.)

Purposes of the Survey

The *Weekly Reader* **National Survey** has four main purposes:

To provide children with a way of expressing their opinions on significant subjects of concern to themselves and to adults.

To share information about the responses to the survey with the children themselves through the pages of the *Weekly Reader* periodicals.

To communicate the attitudes of children to the adult community through publication of results both in the public press and in scholarly journals.

To provide a record, over time, of the changing attitudes of children about subjects of importance.

Field Publications

The *Weekly Reader* National Survey is developed by the staff of the *Weekly Reader* periodicals, published by Field Publications in Middletown, Connecticut. Field Publications is a publisher and marketer of educational and entertaining material for children and adults. *Weekly Reader* periodicals reach a total of over 10 million American children in preschool through junior high school. The company also runs a variety of book clubs for all ages, making it the country's largest book club marketer.

General Methodology

Subject areas for the ***Weekly Reader*** **National Survey** were developed first by polling the editorial staff of the *Weekly Reader* periodicals and then by conducting research with teachers about the areas they thought would be most important to survey.

Questions for each survey are developed by the *Weekly Reader* periodicals staff after a review of literature in a specific field. When appropriate, consultations are held with specialists and organizations that have a particular interest and expertise in an area.

Questions are then pretested with sample groups of children at the appropriate age levels, refined, and tested again, if necessary.

The final printed form of the survey is delivered to students in grades 2-9 in the various editions of the *Weekly Reader* periodicals. For grades 2 and 3, a simplified version of the survey is provided, consisting of one page of questions. These questions are often not identical to those used in the upper grades, so results are not directly comparable but can be used to give a sense of trends across grade levels.

For grades 4-6, a two-page survey is provided in the pages of *Weekly Reader.* All questions are written in a form that can be comprehended by a fourth grader, and teachers are invited to explain the survey if there are any questions. The survey is preceded by a paragraph that explains its purpose and the difference between a survey and a test. Responses to the questions in the grades 4-6 survey constitute the majority of the data used in reporting results. For grades 7-9 the survey is the same as that for grades 4-6, and is carried as appropriate in various *Weekly Reader* secondary periodicals: *Current Events* (social studies), *Read* (language arts), *Current Science* (science), and *Know Your World Extra* (special education). Because of smaller numbers per grade, responses at the 7-9 level are reported as a group rather than by grade level, and are used

primarily to give a sense of grade level trends in relation to the grade 4-6 results.

At all grade levels, the survey is filled out by students in class under a teacher's supervision. (Students do not put their names on the survey, but it might be possible for a teacher to read a particular student's answer, and this must be borne in mind when interpreting results.) After the surveys are filled in, teachers summarize the class results on a form provided in the Teacher's Edition accompanying the student periodicals. They then mail the results to the editorial offices of *Weekly Reader* anonymously on a postage-paid basis. (The teacher summarization takes about half an hour and this could affect results, as only teachers willing to go to that extra effort return surveys.)

When survey forms are received at the *Weekly Reader* editorial offices, they are sorted by grade. A random sample of about 750-1,000 teacher summary forms (representing 19,000 to 25,000 students) is drawn from each grade level in grades 2-6. All forms received from grades 7-9 are used, since the number of respondents in these grades is lower. Overall, forms representing about 500,000 students are usually received, and from these a total sample representing about 100,000 students is selected.

Data from the sampled teacher summary sheets are then entered in a computer, verified, and summarized by grade for grades 2-3 and 4-6, and as a group for grades 7-9. Breakdowns by sex, type of area (urban, suburban, rural), and region of the country are also provided.

Cautions in Interpreting Results

The *Weekly Reader* National Survey is a readership survey, not a random one; that is, the respondents are all subscribers to a *Weekly Reader* periodical whose teachers have decided to conduct the survey in their classes, and hence they do not make up a random sample that can be statistically projected. However, the *Weekly Reader* periodicals are used in about 90 percent of the nation's school districts, and the survey sample of about 100,000 students is so large that it makes an excellent representative sample of the nation's children.

Because the survey is conducted in class under a teacher's supervision and anonymity cannot be guaranteed, no questions are asked about individual beliefs or behavior regarding sensitive issues. Questions about what "kids" or "kids your age" think are sometimes used. Further, students are not asked to report on their own behavior, but on what they believe to be happening among other students.

Distribution, Use of Results And Archiving

The results of **The *Weekly Reader* National Survey** are distributed by *Weekly Reader* through press releases to the general media, through scholarly articles, and through reports such as this one. The press releases usually generate articles on the wire services, on network radio and TV, in national papers such as *USA Today,* in local media interested in the application of the results to local areas, and in a variety of special-interest publications. More scholarly presentations of the results appear in such publications as *Statistical Bulletin, Medical Times, Social Education,* and *Phi Delta Kappan.*

Because **The *Weekly Reader* National Survey** is one of the few sources of national data about American children's attitudes, it is widely used in discussions about policy affecting children. In the case of the DRUGS AND ALCOHOL survey, the *Federal Strategy on Drug Abuse Prevention* was changed as a direct result of the survey information.

Complete data are kept at the *Weekly Reader* editorial offices, 245 Long Hill Road, Middletown, CT 06457, and at The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, 421 Monteith Hall (Box U-164), Storrs, CT 06268. The Center is a non-profit educational research archive in which are also stored the survey results of The Gallup Organization, The CBS News and *The New York Times* survey, and many other surveys. Copies of the Research Reports are also filed with the Educational Resources Information Center's *Resources in Education,* published at the School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109.

THE SURVEY ON SAFETY AND HEALTH

Rationale

The editors of *Weekly Reader* selected Safety and Health as the subject of the survey conducted in the spring of 1986 because...

safety and health are subjects about which children have extensive personal knowledge and opinions;

safety and health are currently subjects of particular adult concern, with an unprecedented level of personal involvement in these areas;

the attitudes of children about safety and health are likely to have a direct effect on future successes of reforms in these areas.

Specific Methodology for Safety and Health Survey

The methodology for the survey on SAFETY AND HEALTH followed the general methodology outlined earlier, except that the survey was not carried in *Weekly Reader* secondary periodicals. As a result, total response was somewhat lower than for past surveys.

More than 13,000 teachers, representing nearly 400,000 students, responded to the survey. A sample of 4,250 teachers' summary forms was randomly selected for processing. Each teacher form represents roughly 30 students.

Participation by grade was as follows:

Grade	Estimated Student Responses	Total Teacher Responses	Teacher Forms Processed
2	148,200	4,940	1,000
3	143,550	4,785	1,000
4	43,860	1,462	750
5	36,900	1,230	750
6	27,000	900	750
Total	**399,510**	**13,317**	**4,250**

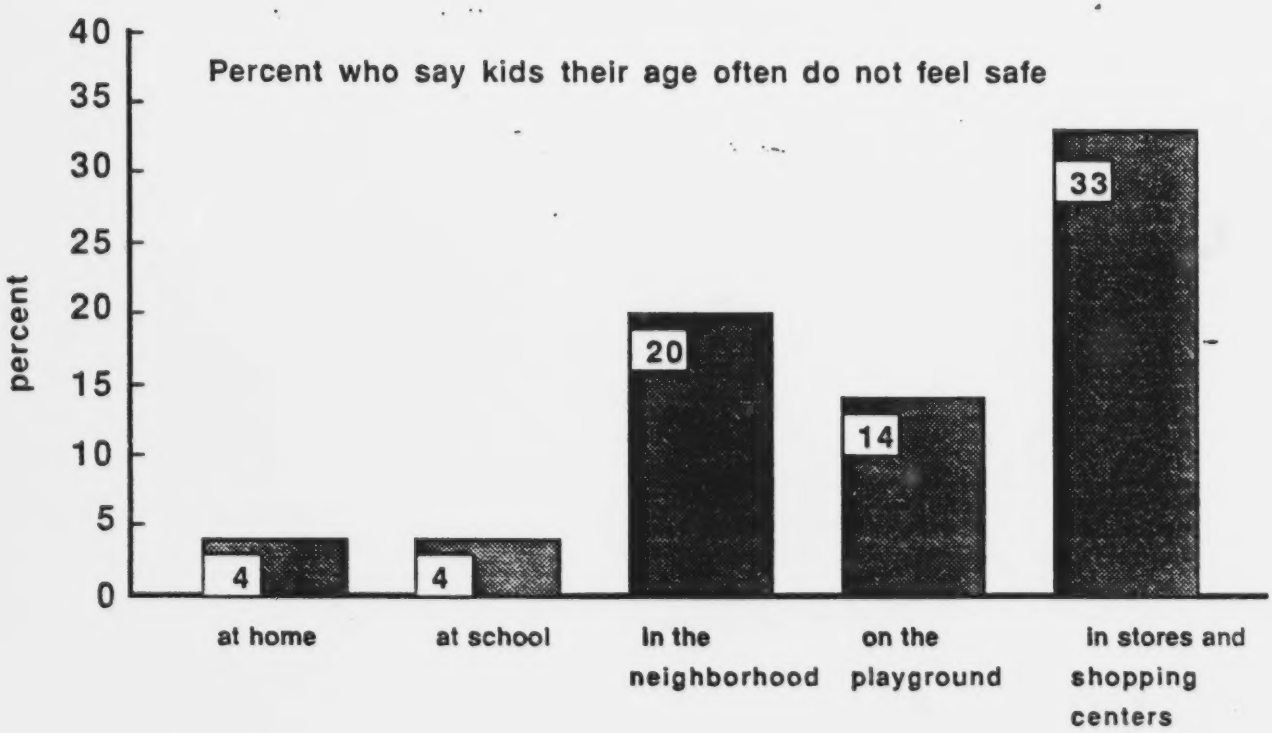
The survey was conducted the week of January 31, 1986.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

Listed below are some places kids spend time. How safe do you think kids your age feel in each of these places?
(always feel safe, usually feel safe, often do not feel safe)

at home
at school
in the neighborhood
on the playground
in stores and shopping centers



(average of grades 4, 5, 6)

Summary of answers

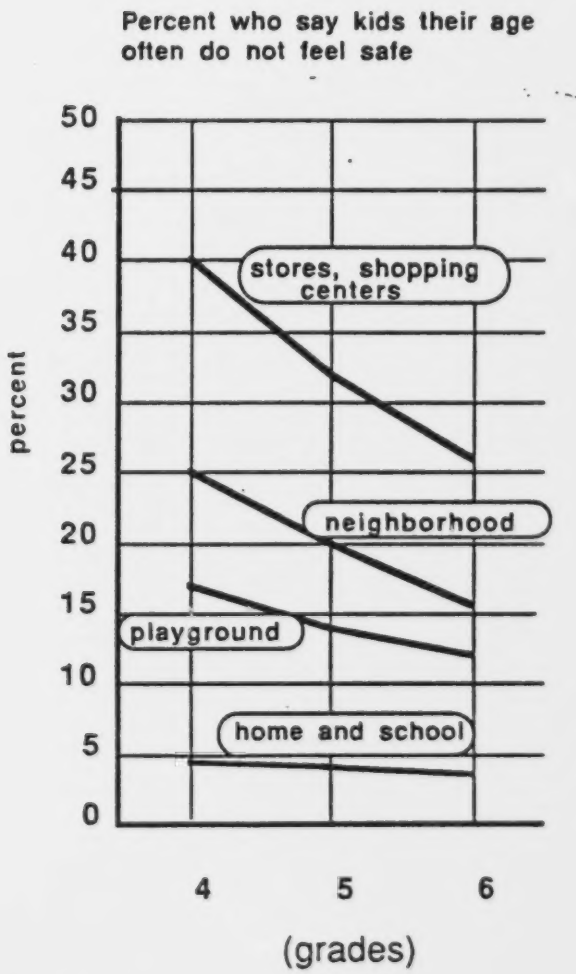
Children in grades 4 to 6 feel safer at home than they do in most other places. Four percent say kids their age "often do not feel safe" at home; 4 percent say the same for at school; 14 percent, for on the playground; 20 percent, for in the neighborhood; and 33 percent, for in stores and shopping centers.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

Listed below are some places kids spend time. How safe do you think kids your age feel in each of these places?
(always feel safe, usually feel safe, often do not feel safe)

at home
at school
in the neighborhood
on the playground
in stores and shopping centers



Summary of answers

The percentage of children who say kids their age often do not feel safe in stores and shopping centers drops from 40 percent in grade 4 to 26 percent in grade 6. The percentage, about 4 percent, who say kids their age often do not feel safe at home or at school stays constant with age.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

Think about what your parents and teachers tell you about how to stay safe. What do you think about what they tell you? (Circle one).

They make too many rules.
They tell me what I need to know.
I wish they would tell me more.

(grades 2-3)

Summary of answers

Second and third graders are more likely to feel that parents tell them what they need to know to stay safe or that parents should tell them more, than they are to feel that parents set too many rules.

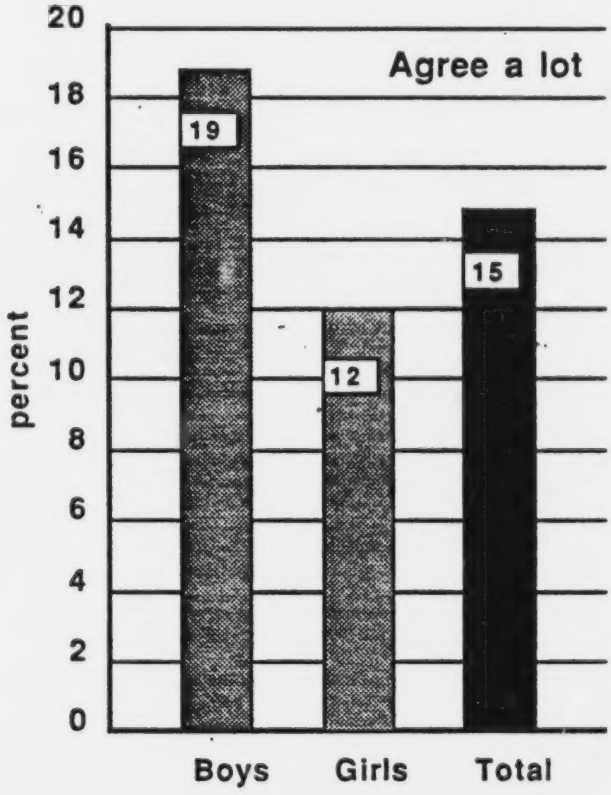
Boys are more likely than girls to feel that parents set too many rules; 13 percent of boys and 7 percent of girls chose this response.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

How much do you agree with the following statement?
(agree a lot, agree some, don't agree at all)

The safety rules parents make for kids are too strict.



(grades 4, 5, and 6)

Summary of answers

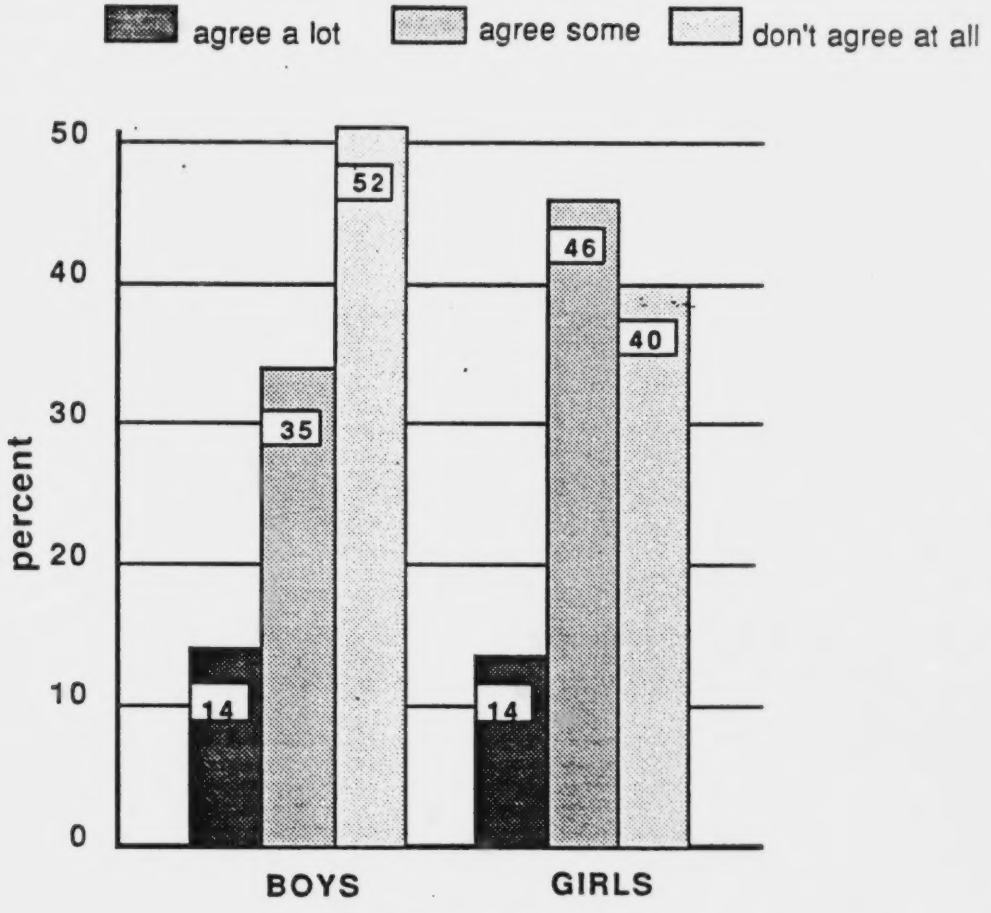
Boys in grades four, five, and six are more likely than girls in those grades to feel that safety rules parents make for kids are too strict. Among boys, 19 percent agree a lot; while among girls, 12 percent agree a lot.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

How much do you agree with the following statement?
(agree a lot, agree some, don't agree at all)

Parents and teachers scare kids sometimes when they talk about ways to stay safe.



(grades 4, 5, 6)

Summary of answers

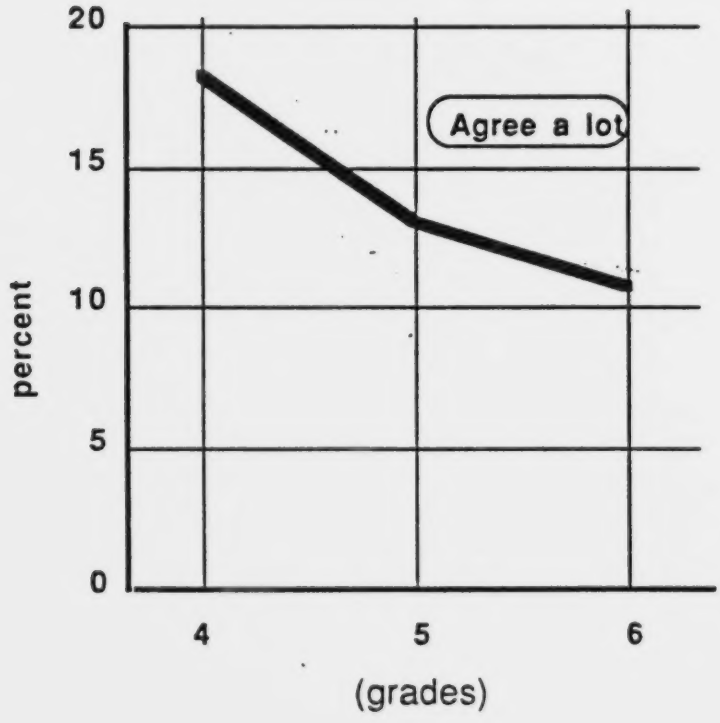
Boys are less likely than girls in grades four through six to report being scared by talk about ways to stay safe. Among boys, 52 percent don't agree at all that parents and teachers scare kids sometimes when they talk about ways to stay safe, compared with 40 percent of girls. Fourteen percent of both boys and girls agree a lot that talk about safety sometimes scares kids.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

How much do you agree with the following statement?
(agree a lot, agree some, don't agree at all)

Parents and teachers scare kids sometimes when they talk about ways to stay safe.



Summary of answers

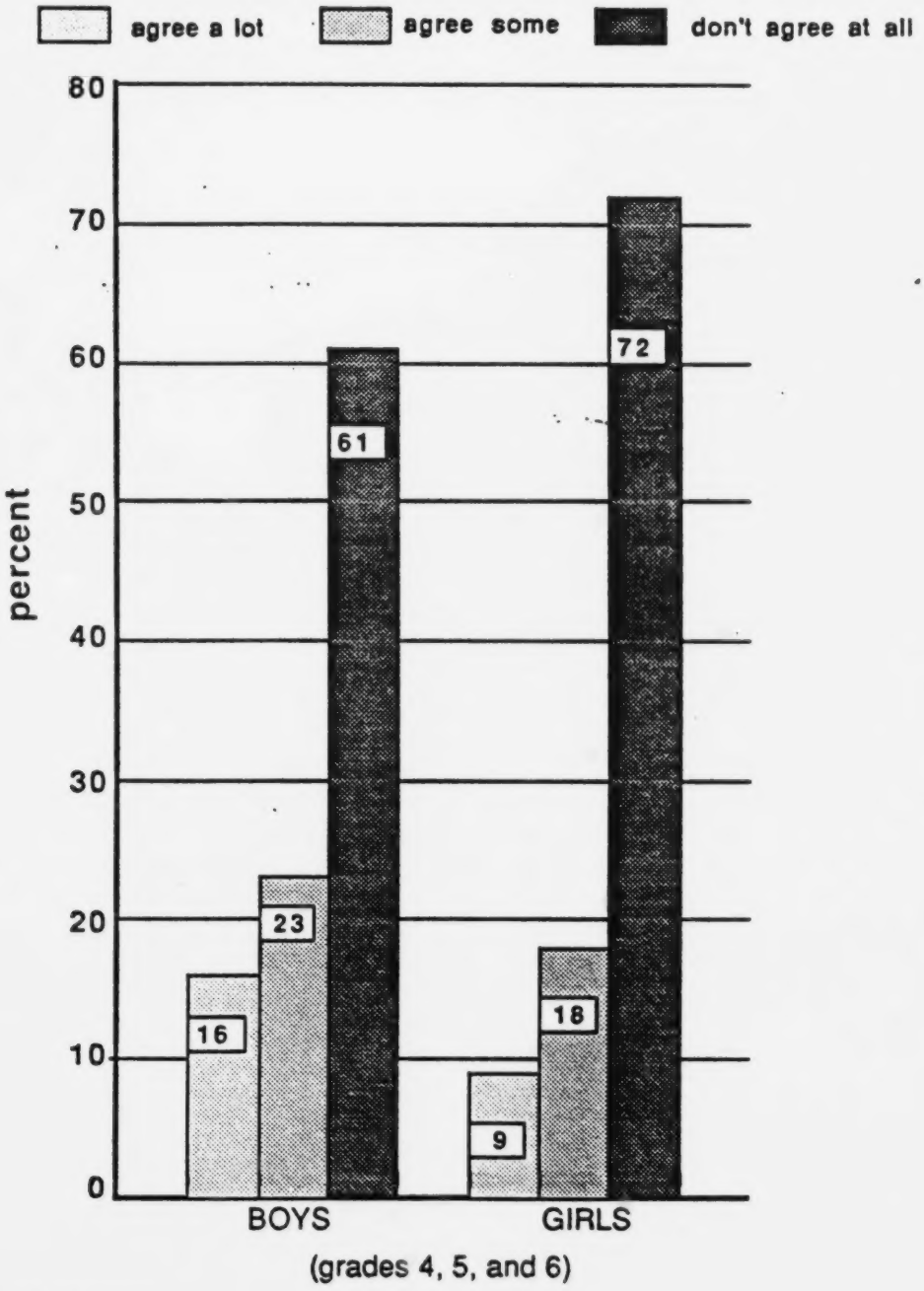
As students grow older, they appear less likely to be scared by talk about ways to stay safe. In the fourth grade, 17 percent of students agree a lot that parents and teachers sometimes scare kids when they talk about ways to stay safe. By fifth grade, this figure has dropped to 13 percent; and by sixth grade, it is 11 percent.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

How much do you agree with the following statement?
(agree a lot, agree some, don't agree at all)

It's more important to have fun than to worry about safety rules.



Summary of answers

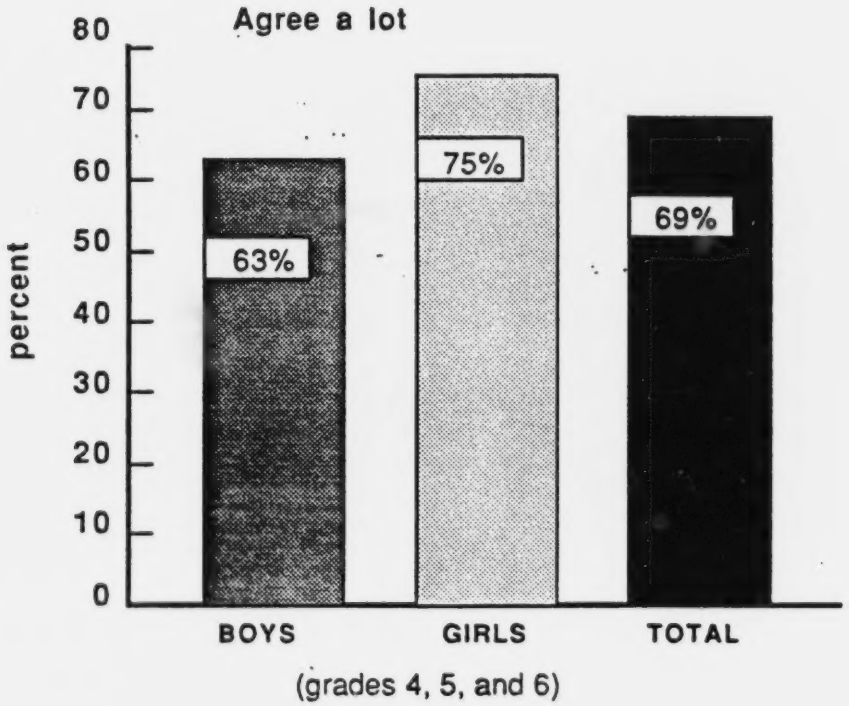
The majority of both boys and girls in grades four through six feel it is more important to worry about safety rules than to have a good time. However, there is a sex difference. Among boys, 16 percent feel having a good time is more important than worrying about safety rules, while 61 percent disagree. Among girls, 9 percent agree that having a good time is more important than safety rules, while 72 percent disagree.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

How much do you agree with the following statement?
(agree a lot, agree some, don't agree at all)

It's OK to be afraid sometimes.



(grades 4, 5, and 6)

Summary of answers

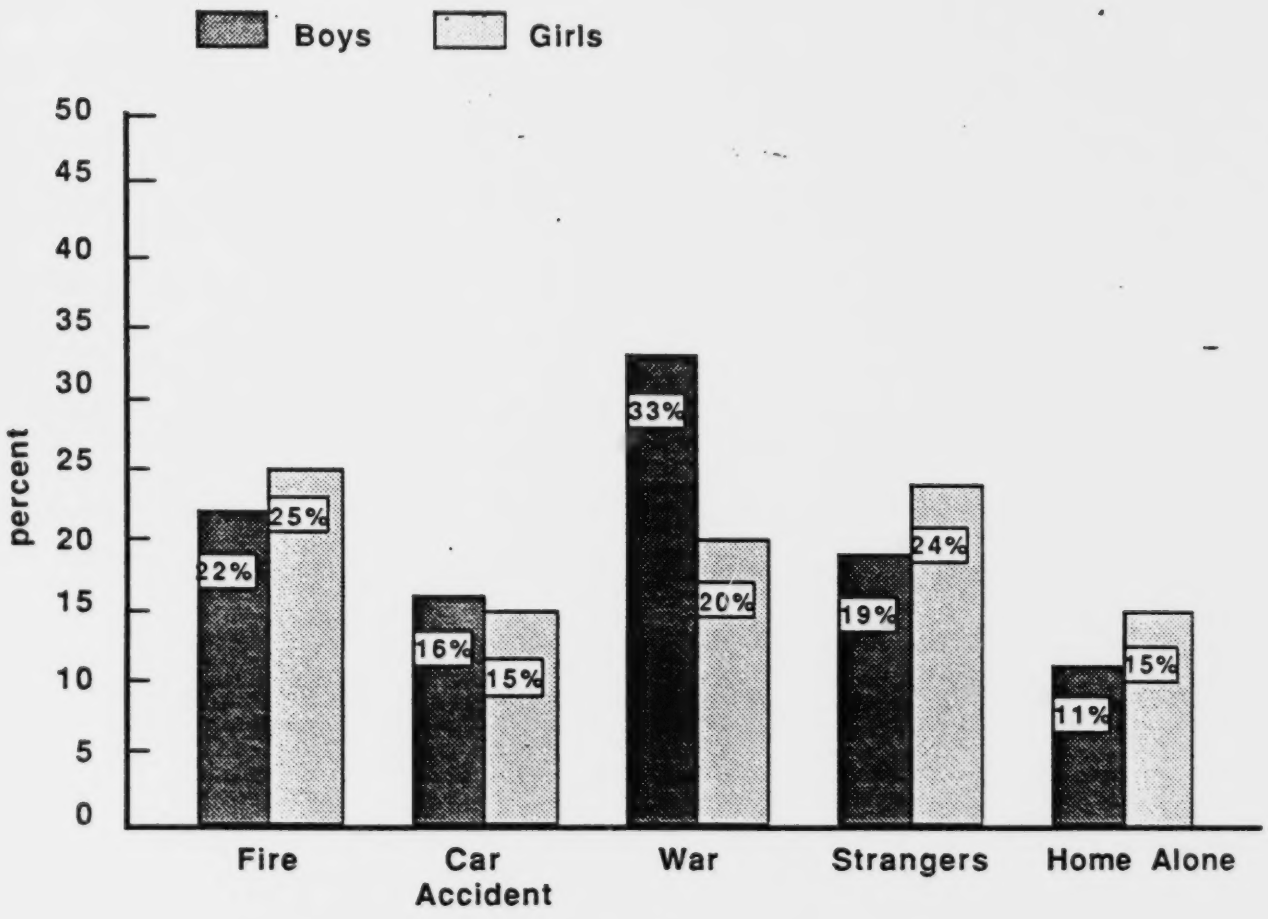
Being afraid sometimes is more acceptable to girls in grades four through six than it is to boys in those grades. Seventy-five percent of girls agree a lot that it is OK to be afraid sometimes, compared with 63 percent of boys.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

Which of these things worry children the most?
(Circle one answer.)

Fire
Car accidents
War
Strangers
Being home alone



(grades 2 - 3)

Summary of answers

Among second and third graders, war is the chief concern among boys (33%); while among girls, fire (25%) narrowly beats out strangers (24%) as the chief concern.

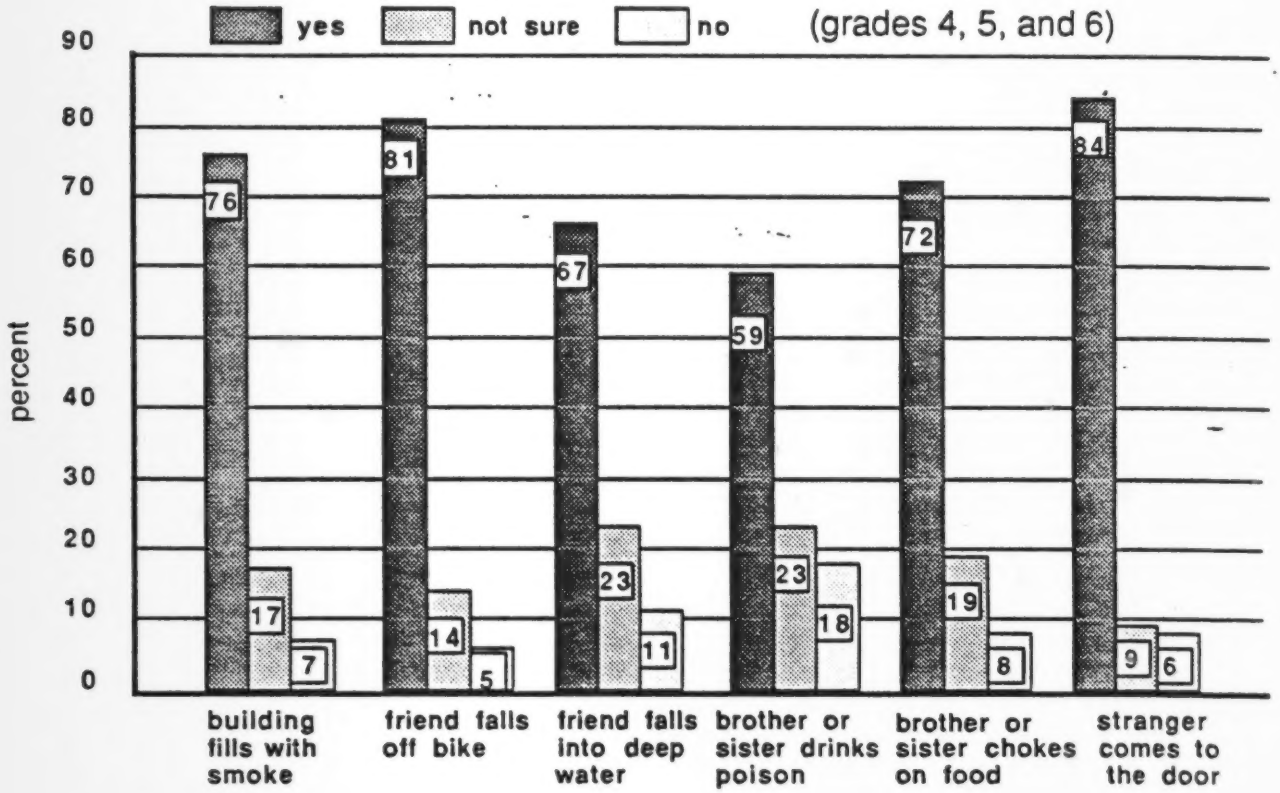
Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

Would you know what to do if each of the following things happened?

(yes, no, not sure)

A building you are in fills with smoke.
A friend falls off a bike and can't get up.
A friend falls into deep water.
Your brother or sister drinks something that is poison.
Your brother or sister starts to choke on some food.
Someone you don't know comes to the door when you are home alone.



Summary of answers

Most students in grades two through six feel fairly sure they can handle most emergencies that might face them.

Among students in grades four to six, 76 percent say they would know what to do if a building they are in fills with smoke, 81 percent say they would know what to do for a friend who falls off a bike and can't get up, 67 percent would know what to do to help a friend who falls into deep water, 59 percent would know how to help a brother or sister who drinks poison, 72 percent would know how to help a brother or sister choking on food, and 84 percent would know what to do if a stranger comes to the door.

In grades two and three, 83 percent of students say they would know what to do if there is a fire in their home. The percentage of second and third graders who would know what to do if someone is choking, if someone takes poison, or if a stranger comes to the door were nearly identical with responses of students in grades four through six.

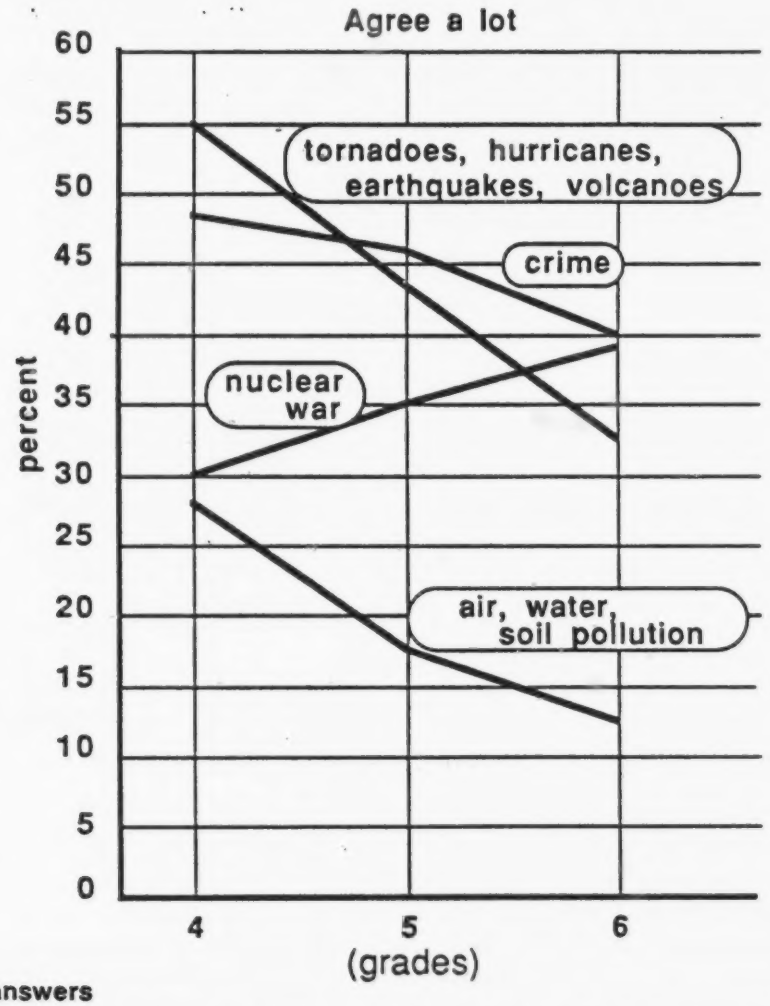
Eighty-nine percent of second and third graders say that if they were lost they could tell a policeman their address and telephone number.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

How much do you agree with each of the following statements?
(agree a lot, agree some, don't agree at all)

Kids worry that crimes they read about or see on TV could happen where they live.
Kids are afraid nuclear war might happen soon.
Kids worry about air, water, and soil pollution.
Kids worry about tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanoes.



Summary of answers

Students' fears of natural disasters, pollution, and crime drop while fear of nuclear war increases from fourth to sixth grade.

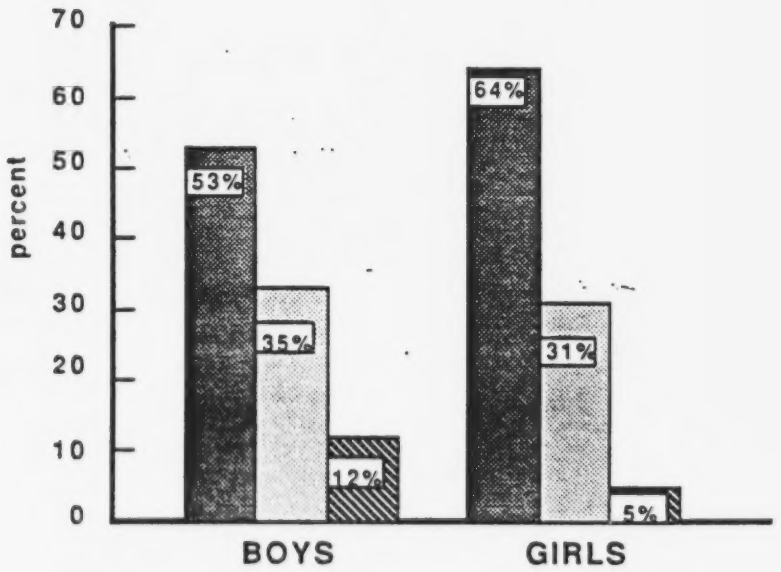
The greatest fear of fourth graders is natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanoes. By sixth grade, these fears have dropped to third place (with 33 percent)--behind fear of crime (40 percent) and fear of nuclear war (39 percent).

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

How do you feel about wearing a seat belt in a car? (Circle one.)

I like wearing a seat belt because it makes me feel safe.
I don't mind wearing a seat belt if I have to.
I don't like to wear a seat belt because it's too much trouble.



(grades 2-3)

Summary of answers

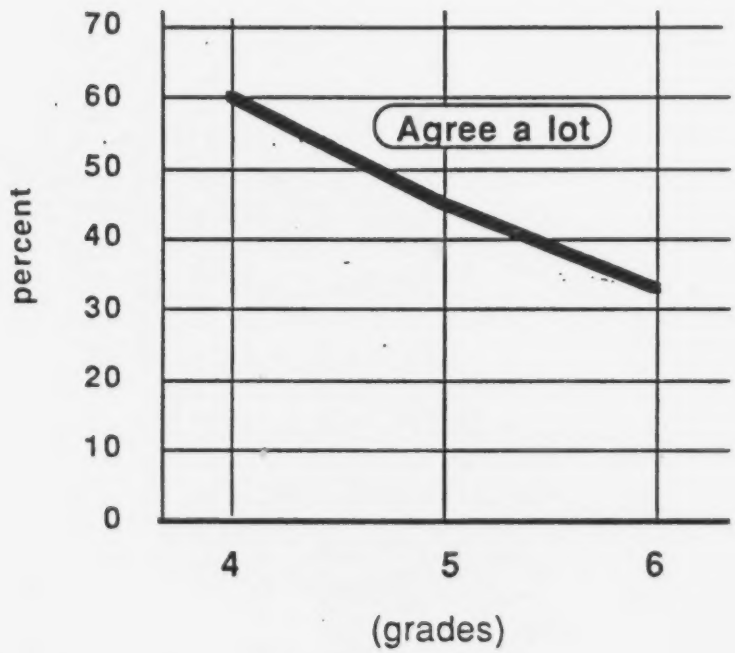
Among second and third graders, 86 percent of boys and 95 percent of girls either like or don't mind wearing seat belts. Girls, at 64 percent, were more likely than boys, at 53 percent, to like wearing seat belts. More than twice as many boys as girls do not like wearing seat belts, with 12 percent of boys opposing the belts, compared with five percent of girls.

Section 1: SAFETY

Question:

How much do you agree with the following statement?
(agree a lot, agree some, don't agree at all)

Kids think it's important to wear seat belts in cars.



Summary of answers

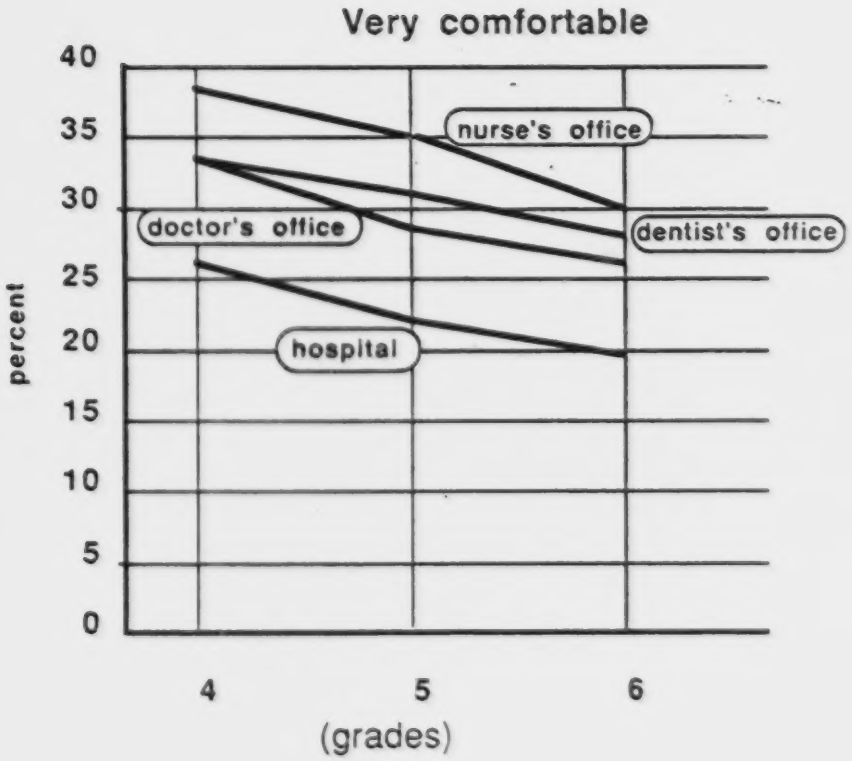
The percentage of students who think it is important to wear seat belts in a car drops by nearly 50 percent from fourth grade to sixth grade. In fourth grade, 60 percent of the students agree that kids think it is important to wear seat belts. In sixth grade, 32 percent of students think it is important to wear seat belts. As with students in grades 2-3, boys are more likely (16 percent) than girls (9 percent) to disagree that seat belts are important.

Section 2: HEALTH

Question:

How comfortable would you feel about going to each of these places?
(very comfortable, somewhat comfortable, not comfortable)

dentist's office
school nurse's office
doctor's office
hospital



Summary of answers

Students feel less and less comfortable about going to places where they receive medical treatment as they progress from fourth grade to sixth grade.

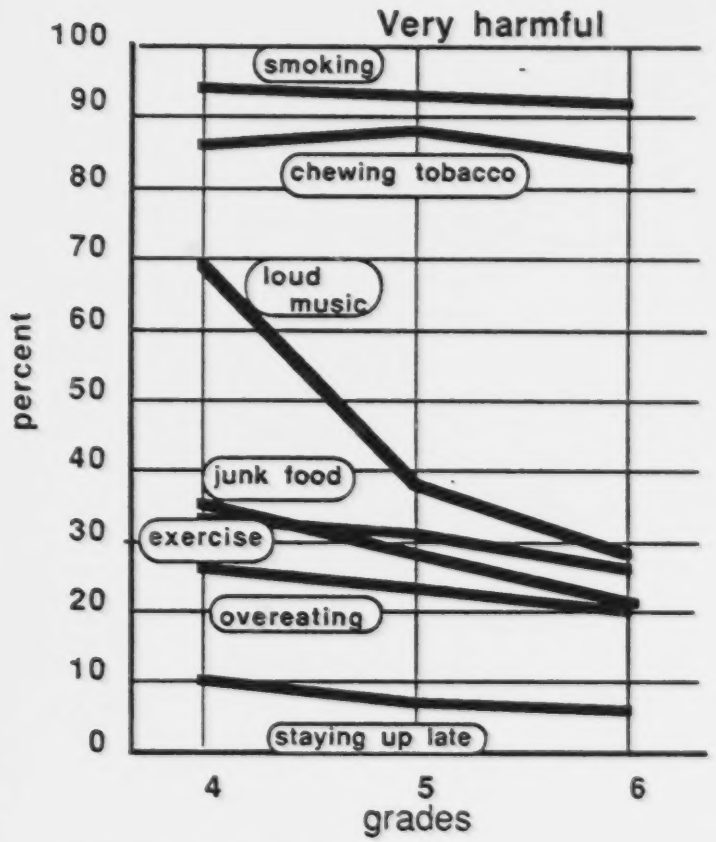
Students feel most comfortable in the school nurse's office and least comfortable in the hospital. In the fourth grade, 38 percent of students feel very comfortable in the school nurse's office; by sixth grade, 30 percent of students feel very comfortable there. Twenty-six percent of fourth graders feel very comfortable in the hospital, with this figure dropping to 20 percent by the sixth grade.

Section 2: HEALTH

Question:

Many people say the following things are harmful for kids to do.
How harmful do you think each is for kids your age?
(very harmful, somewhat harmful, not harmful)

Overeating
Eating junk food
Listening to very loud music
Smoking
Chewing tobacco
Staying up late
Failing to get enough exercise



Summary of answers

There appears to be a drop in the perceived harmful effects of certain activities as students progress from the fourth grade through the sixth grade. The most dramatic drop appears in the percentage of students who consider listening to very loud music to be harmful. In grade four, 69 percent of the students consider listening to loud music to be very harmful; by sixth grade, only 29 percent of students still consider this activity very harmful.

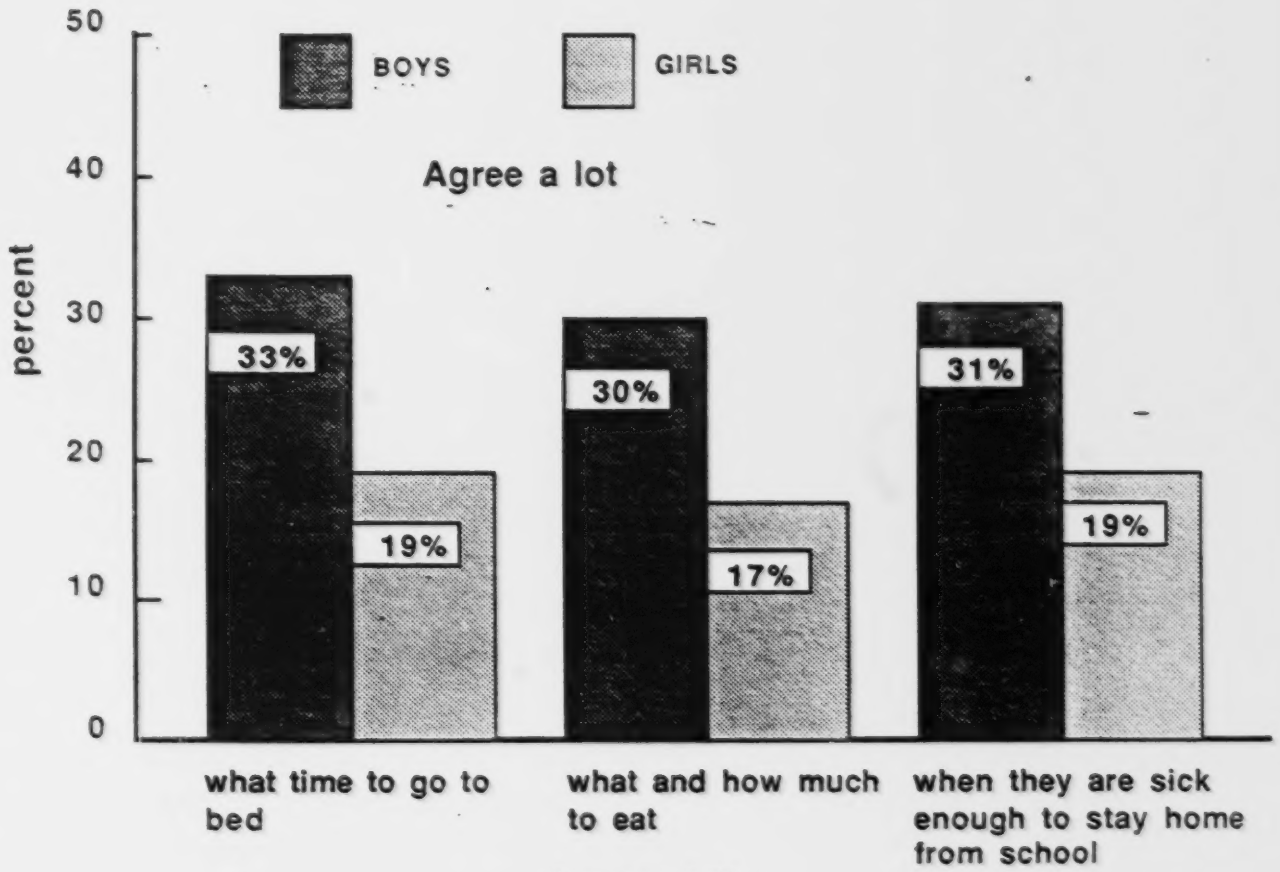
Similar, though less dramatic, drops occur in perceptions of the harmful effects of overeating, eating junk food, staying up late, and failing to get enough exercise. Only the perceived harmful effects of smoking and chewing tobacco are nearly the same in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades.

Section 2: HEALTH

Question:

How much do you agree with each of the following statements about kids your age? (agree a lot, agree somewhat, don't agree at all)

Kids should be allowed to decide what time to go to bed.
Kids should be allowed to decide what and how much to eat.
Kids should be allowed to decide when they are sick enough to stay home from school.



(grades 4-6)

Summary of answers

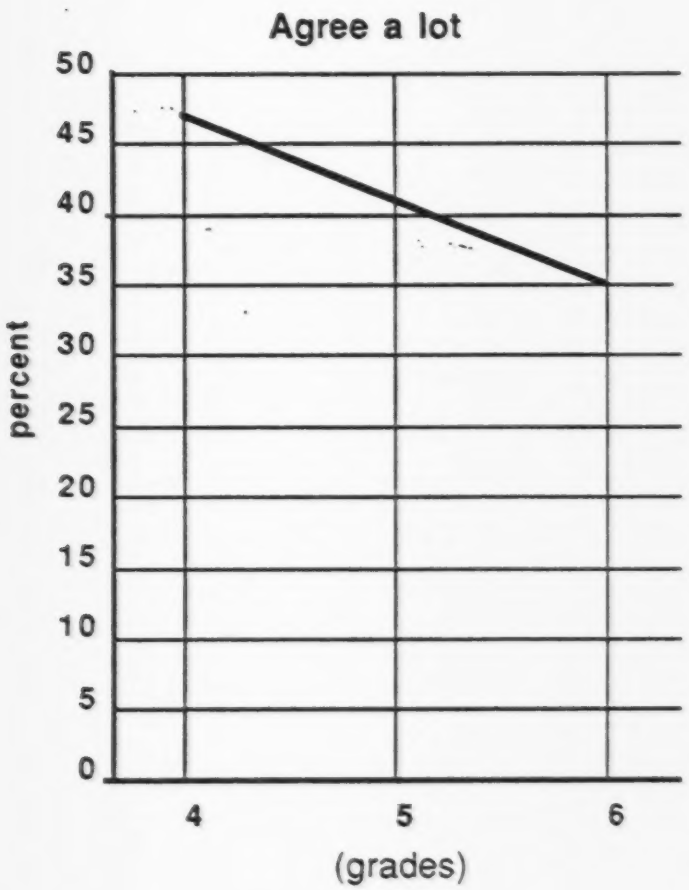
Among students in fourth grade to sixth grade, boys are more likely than girls to feel that they should be allowed to make personal decisions such as when to go to bed, what and how much to eat, and when they are sick enough to stay home from school.

Section 2: HEALTH

Question:

How much do you agree with the following statement about kids your age? (agree a lot, agree some, don't agree at all)

Most kids feel good about how they look.



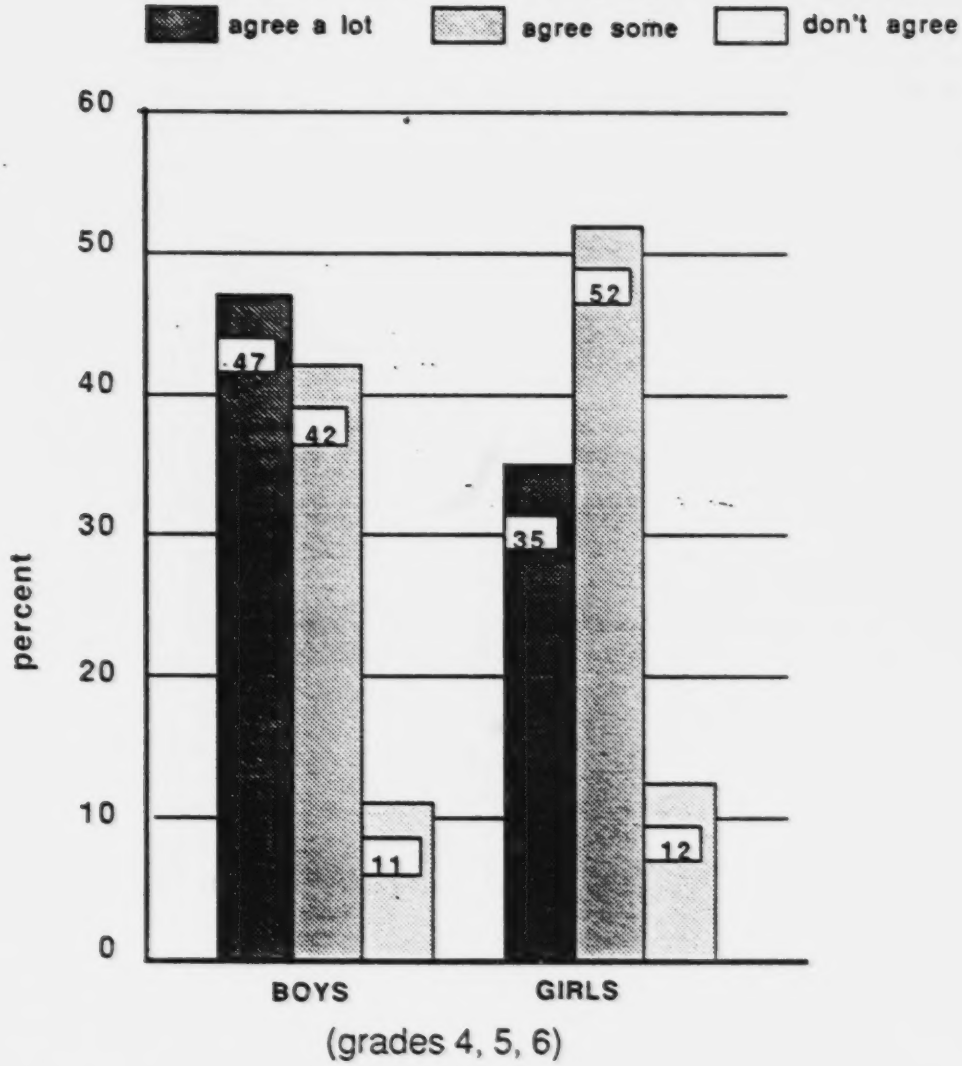
Summary of answers

Satisfaction with physical appearance drops each year between fourth grade and sixth grade.
In fourth grade, 47 percent of students agree a lot that most kids feel good about the way they look.
In sixth grade, only 35 percent agree a lot that most kids feel good about the way they look.

Section 2: HEALTH

Question:

Do you agree that most kids feel good about how they look?



(grades 4, 5, 6)

Summary of answers

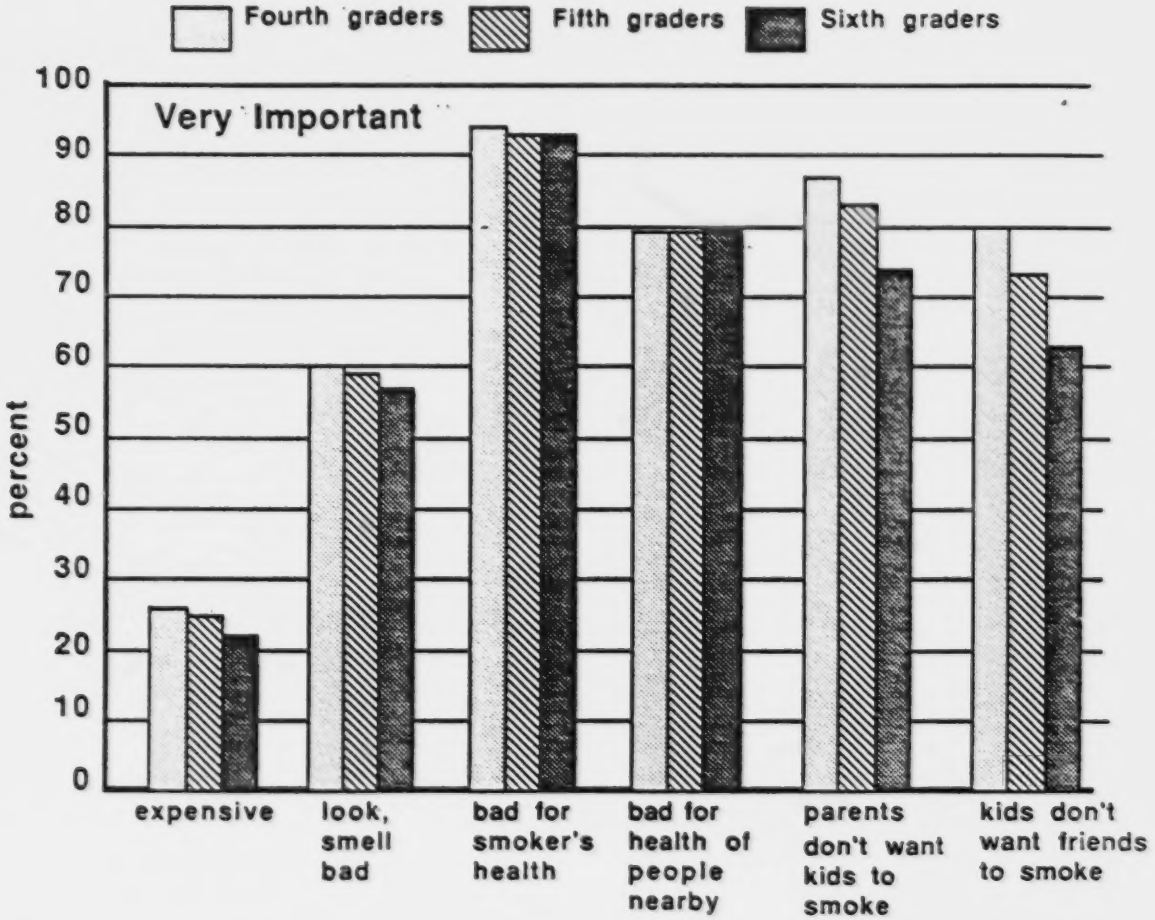
Boys in grades four through six may be more satisfied with their appearance than girls. Forty-seven percent of boys agree a lot that kids their age feel good about their looks, compared with 35 percent of girls.

Section 2: HEALTH

Question:

Listed below are some reasons not to smoke. How important is each reason? (very important, somewhat important, not important)

Cigarettes are expensive.
Smoking makes a person look and smell bad.
Smoking can be bad for the smoker's health.
Smoking can be bad for the health of people nearby.
Parents don't want kids to smoke.
Kids don't want their friends to smoke.



Summary of answers

The effects of smoking on the smoker's health is the major reason students in grades four through six give for not smoking. Ninety-four percent of fourth graders and 93 percent of fifth and sixth graders agree that it is very important not to smoke because of the bad effects on the smoker's health.

The second most important reason fourth and fifth graders give for not smoking is that parents don't want kids to smoke. Eighty-seven percent of fourth graders and 83 percent of fifth graders consider parents' wishes an important reason for not smoking. By sixth grade, however, the effect of smoking on the health of people nearby becomes the second most important reason for not smoking.